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ABSTRACT

Independent study or distance education courses were established in 1973 at five universities in Sweden. Evaluation of the project was planned to include: (1) a description of the student population, (2) a study of the students' use of and attitudes toward distance-bridging aids such as examinations and methods of instruction, (3) a special study of the students' geographical spread, (4) a study of the effects of the admission rules, (5) analysis of dropouts, (6) interviews with the teachers, and (7) an analysis of prospective student inquiries. Twelve additional Swedish reports and three English reports are cited. (Author/DS)

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Educational Development

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Current Project

1975:2

Title of project: Evaluation of distance education

In progress at: Department of Educational Development,
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Scientific leader: Professor Urban Dahlöf

Project leader: Birgitta Willén, Ph. D.

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Background and purpose

Distance education (sub-project II) is one of three experimental projects proposed to the Government by the 1968 Educational Commission (U 68) for the purpose of testing, in various ways, new forms of distribution for higher education - e.g. with regard to their effects on recruitment.

Distance education is a form of education in which verbal instruction is limited in quantity and is confined to a number of intensive periods spread out during the term or academic year. Between these periods the student works on his own but can consult teachers at the university by telephone or by post. This form of education may be regarded as a development of teaching by correspondence.

The project was started in the autumn term of 1973 with distance education in seven study courses. In the spring term of 1974 an additional 14 study courses were started, and in the academic year 1974-1975 there are 42 study courses at the universities of Uppsala, Lund, Göteborg, Umeå and Linköping.

The intention is for these courses to proceed at what is termed a delayed rate of study. To begin with, the number of students is limited to 30 per course, subsequently rising during the experimental period to 60.

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For further information about distance education, see Willén 1973, 1974.

The aims of the evaluation

General outlines for the evaluation were given by the Office of the Chancellor of the Swedish Universities (UKÄ) in 1973.

According to these outlines the following questions, among others, should be answered:

- I What methods should be used to give education to students who are not in the lecture room or even at the educational institution?
- II Can we manage without any form of two-way contact? If the answer is no, how should this contact be arranged? Is informal telephone contact between the teacher and the student enough? What form of correspondence teaching is most effective? Are there other methods of compensation for the absence from the institution?
- III How should periods of oral instruction at the institution be co-ordinated with the private studies at home? How should the laboratory work which is necessary in some subjects be arranged?
- IV What are the main student groups which the education should be planned for?
- V What geographical region should activities concern?
- VI Can such educational aids as are already available, be used in distance education? Do they need to be complemented, for instance by some form of study guide, to make the material self-instructing? Is new production of educational aids necessary?

Evaluation, which started in the autumn term of 1973, was limited for the academic year 1973-1974 to distance education at the University of Umeå. Starting in the academic year 1974-1975, distance education will also be evaluated at all other institutions where it is provided.

Investigation, disposition and problems

The sectors to be covered by evaluation are listed below. Sectors 1-6 concern different aspects of the students. Sectors 7 and 8 concern problems of teaching method and the importance of information as a determinant of participation/non-participation in distance studies.

1. Description of the population and student analysis

A questionnaire is given to each one of the distance students all over the country. Relevant variables and groups of variables in this connection are:

Social circumstances	marital status number of children age sex
Social background	parents' occupation parents' education husband's/wife's occupation husband's/wife's education
Educational background	education at grammar school level (equiv.) higher education other form of education (full time and part time) different courses (full time and part time)
Occupation and employment	present occupation previous occupation (for one year or more) hours of work in present occupation attitude to present occupation
Distance education	attitude of the family to present studies the employer's attitude to present studies leave of absence from work (if any) for present studies the form of the leave of absence from work number of study hours planned per week study technique attitude to studies self-confidence regarding studies reason for lack of self-confidence long term plan for studies study alternatives study motives

2. *The students' use of and attitudes to distance over-bridging aids*

The following questions are of great interest:

- The students' views on the meetings for oral instruction.
- The students' need of critical discussion and instruction.
- The students' attitudes to examination.
- The students' attitudes to educational aids.
- The social and psychological consequences of the distance education for the participants.

Information about the students' use of and attitudes to distance over-bridging aids will be received in two ways. All students will be given a questionnaire to answer when they have finished

their studies. To make it possible to construct this questionnaire distance students will be interviewed. These interviews will also be used to aid interpretation of the results from the questionnaires.

A considerable part of the information about the studies, as well as a great part of the instruction given to the distance students is made via telephone contact between the teachers and the students. To make it possible to systematize this information, a telephone registration form has been made. This way of documenting problems has been a great aid to the teachers in so far as it has been possible to get a view of the frequency of the problems, their structure, contents and locality in the course, and out of these particulars find and discuss alternative models to solve the more serious and frequent problems.

For more comprehensive evaluation there are also some interesting aspects in connection with the recorded problems and categories of problems. We hope it may be possible to see if and how different subjects are connected with different problems, if the problems are different for different course units within the same subject, if the problems are changing with time etc.

When the recorded problems are more individually related they can answer questions about the individuals' special difficulties, point out the students who try to establish contact themselves with the institutes or the teachers, and the students who are contacted by the institutes etc.

This part of the study will be confined to about five departments at the University of Umeå.

3. *A special study of the students' geographical spreading etc.*

A special study of the geographical spreading effects of the distance education was considered desirable.

We wish to know something about the spreading of the distance students to different places of residence and we plan to study the following topics during April-May 1975:

1. where the students live
2. the size of the places of residence
3. the distribution of students between different places of residence
4. distance between the university and the students' place of residence
5. distance between decentralized university education or extramural university education and the students' place of residence
6. distance between a place where study circles or the like are run, and the students' place of residence.

4. *A study of the effects of the admission rules*

On the basis of the application form, a comparison will be made of those admitted to distance education and those not admitted. The comparison will refer to the following variables:

1. sex
2. age
3. place of residence
4. educational background
5. vocational experience
6. occupation

A comparison between the various universities will be of interest here, since admission rules have varied from one place to another.

5. *Analysis of drop-outs*

Students who have ended their distance studies without completing them will probably be interviewed by telephone, since we find it very important to study this group.

6. *Study results*

The following questions have been regarded as interesting:

1. Do the results differ between different distance students when considering educational background, basic knowledge, test, motivation, occupation etc?
2. Do the examination results differ between the distance students and other adult students?
3. Are new forms of examination used in distance education, compared with traditional education?

The data are taken from each department after the courses are finished. To make a comparison with other delayed students (point 2) a comparison will be made with a planned investigation within the Office of the Chancellor of the Swedish Universities. Information about the forms of examination and continuous assessment will be taken by interviewing teachers.

7. *The teachers*

The following topics will be clarified by interviewing the teachers at the various departments that are providing distance education. Interviews will be made on two occasions, at the start and after the course is finished.

1. The planning of the education and the examination.
2. The contact between teacher and student in this kind of education compared with traditional university education.
3. The attitude to distance - bridging aids.
4. How are the educational aids functioning, and must new ones be produced?

5. Changes in the teachers' work load compared with traditional education.
6. Pedagogical effects on regular education.

8. *Analysis of inquiries*

A questionnaire will be sent out to persons who have been interested in distance education at the beginning of the spring term of 1974, the autumn term of 1974, and the spring term of 1975, but who have not applied for distance studies. Here we are interested to know why persons who have got information about distance education have not applied, and what they thought of the information (printed materials and oral information from the university).

The analysis is made on the following variables:

- a) sex
- b) social background
- c) previous education
- d) occupation
- e) place of residence
- f) attitude to the distance education
- g) attitude to the information about distance education
- h) reason for not applying for distance education

A comparison between this group and the group which has begun distance studies will be made on the variables a - g.

This presentation of the evaluation may give an unnecessarily disparate picture, therefore it must be pointed out at once that the different problem complexes will be related to each other. Data illuminating different problems have been gathered by the same techniques and often at the same time. The final report of the study will examine some of the interrelationships between them.

Timetable

Academic year 1974-1975: Collection of data.

Academic year 1975-1976: Processing of data, final report.

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